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# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY



THIS IS THE FEAST



## BRIEF PRAYERS ON NEWS ITEMS

*Sonia C. Solomonson*

Don't feel helpless when you hear negative news stories. Pray for those people and concerns. You might clip articles or pictures of those for whom you pray—or even make a prayer book.

### CONGREGATION CELEBRATES BREAD-MAKING

Every year Nazareth Lutheran Church in Chatfield, Ohio, hosts a celebration of home-baked breads called the Bread of Life Festival to show that eating is essential, not optional, just as Jesus, our Bread of Life, is essential and not optional. Members bring homemade bread to church, decorate the church with bread and wheat, and serve the bread on the church lawn after worship.

*Open our eyes to the many gifts around us, O Bread of Life.*

### LIRS AMBASSADORS SOUGHT

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service wants "ambassadors" to speak out in their communities on behalf of new Americans, refugees, and asylum-seekers. From many backgrounds, and chosen by appli-

cation or nomination, ambassadors receive special training for this volunteer work. For information, call Denise Laugtug at 701-293-1113.

*Help us to see the many opportunities for hospitality around us, Loving God.*

### EDUCATION FOR AFRICAN WOMEN

Last fall the second women's conference of the Lutheran Communion in Western Africa met in Jos, Nigeria. Delegates passed this resolution: "Be it resolved that the Lutheran World Federation and our partner churches make women's education a priority area in all aspects of our churches and communities." In his opening address, Bishop David Windibiziri of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria said, "With the economic crisis we find in many of our African countries, it's still a fact that you have to make more effort to get education if you are a girl." Conference participants also resolved to be in prayer on the question of women's ordination.

*God of All Creation, thank you for the gifts of our sisters in Africa.*

**LWT**

*Sonia C. Solomonson is a senior editor for The Lutheran.*

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# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

For growth in  
faith and mission

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"Easter Sunday" is an  
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the congregation is  
singing "This Is the  
Feast" from *Lutheran  
Book of Worship*.

*We draw from our Bible study to share Easter joy with "This is the feast" liturgy drawn from the book of Revelation. This session of the Secure in the Promise Bible study calls us to take risks and do advocacy, for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus, our risen savior.*

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Opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the writers and, except for the Women of the ELCA department and the Bible study, are not necessarily those of the Women of the ELCA.

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# How great sings Art

Daniel L. Bohlman

I made my way down the too-brightly lit, white hallway of the nursing home to the last room on the right. That is where Annie was dying—and her family was waiting for me to change things. Not that I could change Annie in any physical way, but they wanted the powers of death to be exorcised from the room. I was happy when a reprieve came in the form of Art's voice calling out my name.

Backpedaling, I peered into his room. There in his reclining chair sat Art. He reminded me so much of my grandfather. He had thinning, grayish-brown hair, combed perfectly, betraying the fact that he wasn't the one who did the combing. He wore a red flannel shirt, green factory pants, and work boots neatly tied above the ankle. Art had incredibly bowed legs.

Grabbing hold of the chair arms, Art pulled himself up, and asked, "How is Annie doing?"

"Not good. The family just called me in."

Art didn't flinch, even though he had known Annie for more than 80 years. The years of friendship seemed to comfort him, and he told me, "She's a strong woman of faith." Then to this fledgling pastor he added, "It's the family you have to help."

I took in his comment. I had learned to listen to him. Art didn't speak many words, but he said more than most people I knew. After a short conversation (which was driven by my internal desire to stall the inevitable), I thanked Art and went down the hall.

The family surrounded a sleeping Annie. Her breathing was labored, her face drooped in open admission of surrender. I took hold of her hand, and together with the family we prayed. Art was right about Annie's faith, so we could comfortably pray for her to go, to let the suffering end. We knew God's arms surrounded her and we imagined her soon in paradise.



***"It's the family you have to help."***



*I heard a  
noise in the  
distance ...*

I expected that my ministry to Annie would end with that encounter, but those were the expectations of someone who was not very experienced. Annie lived through the night. The following morning I found myself driving the 20 miles back to the nursing home.

I was met in Annie's room by a few tired family members. It had been a long night for them. I encouraged them as best I could and then once again prayed for Annie, sure this was my last visit. After about an hour, I left.

On the way back down the hall, I stopped at Art's room. Everything was like yesterday, only today the shirt was blue. He knew about Annie's condition, as the family had stopped in periodically to keep him informed. I told him that the family was tired. He peered right past me and said, "Sure, sure. It's hard on the family."

The following morning I was awakened by my alarm clock, not the phone. I had expected a call from the funeral director. On this third morning of her dying, Annie was awake when I met her. She even smiled through her weakness as I shared Psalm 23 with her.

Four different family members were there this morning. They looked so tired, and the stress had brought thick lines to their young faces. I could not help but think of Art, who had told me that it was to the family I needed to minister. So I spent extra time with them and then went in search of my mentor.

Art was sitting in his recliner, but he was different. His hair was messy, his glasses severely cocked. There was nervousness in his usually peaceful manner. He could not seem to get comfortable, and he did not seem interested in my ministry to Annie or her family. Only later did I find that he was working out his own ministerial plans.

Early the next morning, I got a phone call. It was Annie's daughter. She was letting me know that Annie was still alive, but things seemed to be drawing to their inevitable conclusion. The entire family was there and she wanted to know if I could come and lead the family in one final time of prayer. So I went back.

As soon as we said, "Amen," I heard a noise in the distance. At first I couldn't figure out what it was.

I thought maybe it was the cry or the moan of someone in pain. Then the words became clear and the tune familiar. It was singing.

*"I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, the power throughout the universe displayed."*

"How Great Thou Art," I said out loud.

*"Then sings my soul, my Savior God to me, how great Thou art, how great Thou art."*

"It's Art," said one of Annie's sons. "He started singing last night. It wasn't until after 10 p.m. that the nurses aides were able to stop him, and he started in right away this morning. One hymn after another." Annie's son smiled.

"It's been a blessing," said a teary-eyed daughter. The rest nodded their agreement.


Art had sung in a choir long ago but had stopped because he said he couldn't sing anymore. But here he was, singing one more time. He had found his way to minister to the family. He had found his way to bring God's word of power and love to these grieving people. He found a way to bridge his physical limitations, and he sang.

Annie lived for almost four more hours. In that time I was able to do what Art had told me. I pulled the family out of the room for a short time and talked with them alone. I knew it was OK to do this, for Art remained in his recliner and ministered to his old friend Annie one last time—"Amazing Grace," "Just As I Am," "When We All Get to Heaven."

I stayed with the family until Annie died. I remained until the funeral director took her body. Then I stopped at Art's room to thank him for what he had done.

From his recliner chair, he smiled back and said, "I didn't think I could sing anymore."

Oh, Art, I thought, your voice only got better with age.

Art died a year later. We sang a lot at his funeral. And now, at Easter, when we sing "This Is the Feast" and "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia!" and "Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won!" I imagine him—with Annie—among the great cloud of witnesses, singing along. 

***... it was singing.***

*Daniel L. Bohlman is a pastor of Apple Grove and Yellowstone Lutheran churches in Argyle, Wis.*



# *This Is the Feast*

Deanna Wildermuth



"Are we there yet?" "How much further do we have to go?" "Can we stop?" "When are we going to get there?"

Car trips and children!

Surviving a journey with children can be a challenge. Parents devise all sorts of plans for passing the time. There are games to play, books to read, conversations to share, and sometimes songs to sing.

From my experience, when music becomes a part of the journey, the trip is more enjoyable.

We are travelers through life. Our journey has been long, and as we near the new millennium some people are tired. I hear voices asking, "Are we there yet?" "How much further do we have to go?" "When are we going to get there?" Many people are growing weary of travel and search for relief.

John, the writer of the book of Revelation, knew that life's journey was hard. Revelation details some of the difficulties of living as God's people still on the road. However, in the midst of all the trouble we may encounter as we travel, John reminds us of our destination. In Revelation we are given the vision of our future. Our journey ends in jubilant song in the presence of God. Revelation provides us with music for our travels.

As Lutherans, we join in amazing sounds of vocal music. Our tradition knows that somehow the words and promises of God that are sung enter deep into our spirit. The holy words of Scripture become rooted in our lives,



reappearing at moments when life's journey is hard. God's word becomes "music to our ears." This is how I experience the book of Revelation.

Many of our treasured hymns and liturgy are drawn from Revelation. At Eastertime it is especially fitting to reflect on the words of "This Is the Feast" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, pp. 60-61) and hear the wisdom of Revelation (especially chapters 5-7) from which it draws.

*"This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia."*

*"Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God."*

The voices of God's people sound loud and clear as worship begins. Looking out over those assembled, I smile gently at the woman whose husband recently died. I look at the young man who is struggling with school. My eyes linger on the family broken by divorce. We are travelers through life, and our voices join in song.

*"Power, riches, wisdom, and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are his."*

*"Sing with all the people of God and join in the hymn of all creation."*

The sound of the familiar hymn of praise fills my ears as I gaze at the gathered people of God. Revelation's gift of song enters our journey, providing relief as we travel.

Yes, sometimes the road is rough for God's people. The journey is long. But in Revelation we receive a vision of our destination and the gift of song to help our travel. When music becomes a part of the journey, we find encouragement to stay on the road.

*"Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen."*

*"For the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Alleluia."*

These words from Revelation are sung before the throne of God. This is the song of our future that we begin singing while still on the road. Revelation is music to my ears because I hear the saints who have completed the journey singing before God. Hearing their song gives me hope to continue. Revelation is music to my ears because here and now I sing with those saints. Joining their song gives me strength for my journey. Revelation is music to my ears because today I stand before God, weary of traveling, and I sing the song of my future.

As you journey through life, and as you journey through the *Secure in the Promise* Bible study, may the songs of Revelation be music to your ears.

*"This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia!"* **LWT**



*Deanna Wildermuth serves as pastor at a two-point rural parish in the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She travels*

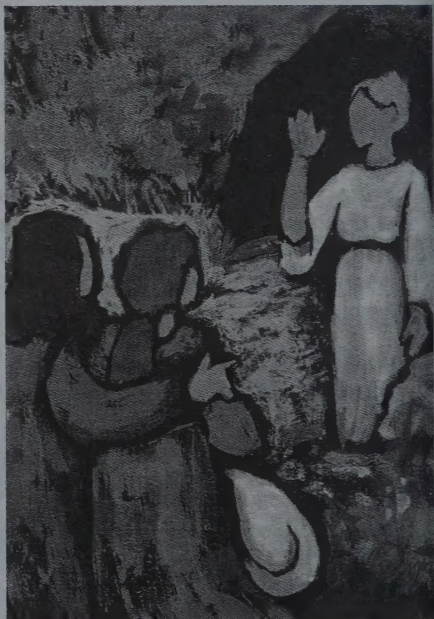
*through life with her husband, Keith, and two sons, Alan and Daniel.*

## EASTER HYMNS IN REVELATION

*Secure in the Promise* writer Gwen Sayler lists some of the Easter hymns that draw from the book of Revelation (see p. 30 of the Bible Study Leader Guide). You may wish to reflect on one or more of these hymns during your Easter devotions. In *Lutheran Book of Worship*, see hymns numbered 128, 131, 132, 133, 141, 142, 143, 170, and 328. In *With One Voice*, see hymns numbered 671 and 679.

# Resurrection revealed

Addie J. Butler



**The women gathered**—Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Mark 16:1). There was women's work to do. They gathered at the darkest part of the night, the time just before dawn. They came prepared for the job at hand. They brought spices that they had prepared for the body of Jesus. He was to be the Messiah, the Anointed One. He was to be the chosen one; of his kingdom there was to be no end. But this same Jesus lay dead. And the women gathered to do the only thing left to be done, to properly prepare his body for its eternal rest.



They came in faithfulness. They came out of a sense of duty. In their grief they came. The women gathered. There was women's work to do.

They never imagined that this day would come. Mary Magdalene could not fathom it that day, so long ago, when she had been cleansed of seven demons. Mary, the mother of James, never imagined it: when he was in Galilee, she followed him, and ministered unto him (Mark 15:41). When Salome asked Jesus to grant that her two sons might sit one on the right hand and the other on the left in Jesus' kingdom, she had no idea that it was for this fate that she asked. Yet, despite their incredulity, the women gathered. Despite their disappointment, this was their destiny. Despite their grief, there was women's work to do.

There they stood, spices in hand, at the empty tomb. They thought they had already experienced all the pain that they could bear, and now this! They thought they had been prepared for anything, for everything, but not this! They thought they were to inherit the glorious kingdom of God, not the emptiness of a sepulcher. The women gathered in their pain, their disbelief, their grief, and their doubt. The women gathered. There was women's work to do.

Then, as the morning began to dawn, with streaks of rose and light-blue and white in the sky of this new day, there was a miracle. Their mourning turned to joy. Their despair to delight. Their pain to pleasure. Their sense of hopelessness faded away. He was alive! He had been raised as he said! With excitement they spread the news.



**The women gathered again in 1983.** They were ordinary women, like Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Salome. Their names, however, were Addie, Sheryl, and Marilyn. They were deans at one of the nation's leading community colleges. All three held doctorate degrees. Together, they had a total

of nearly 50 years of administrative experience on the community-college level.

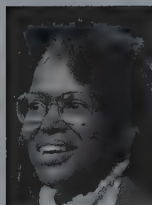
These women had earned their success. They had spent innumerable hours and energy—first in academic pursuit and then in administrative employment. They were respected by their peers, and they identified themselves by their positions. Then the curtain fell.

The college's administrative structure would be streamlined, down-sized, and their services were no longer needed.

They never imagined that this day would come. After hearing this news the women gathered. There were tears to shed. Anger to express. Nurturing to be done. Prayers to be prayed. The women gathered at the darkest part of their night, not knowing that the hour was just before dawn.

The women gathered because there was women's work to do. God had chosen these women to be witnesses to their own resurrections. Each had a relationship with God, with Jesus, with the Comforter. Each found new meaning in the psalmist's words: "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). In time, their mourning lost its sting, their incredulity turned to belief, their pain to peace. God led them to new positions of responsibility. And they are now empowered—no, compelled—to help other children of God through their life trials to their resurrections, too. As another woman, Ramona, once said, "I believe in the resurrection, but you've got to die first."

We three "resurrection women" cry with the one who has lost a child or parent or other loved one. We listen, serving as a sounding board for the one who has just been diagnosed with cancer or lupus or diabetes or another life-threatening disease. We nurture the teenager whose passage into adulthood has been made more complicated because of an unexpected pregnancy, drug addiction, an automobile accident, or homelessness. Women still continue to gather, in Jesus' name, to help others find the blessed light of the resurrection. **LWT**



*Dr. Addie J. Butler is vice-president of the ELCA. She is the assistant dean of the division of business, science, and technology at Community College of Philadelphia. She is a member at Reformation Lutheran in Philadelphia.*



# Wanted: faithful risk-takers

*Michael Cooper-White*

A job description recently crossed my desk. The final item on the rather daunting list of attributes sought in the person who would fill this high-level position was: "Able to model and support appropriate risk-taking." Knowing a fair amount about the organization posting the position, I mused about just what "appropriate risk-taking" might mean for the person who is selected. Who decides what is appropriate? If it's totally appropriate, can it really be risky? Do they really want someone who's going to shake up an organization that's well-established and successful, and rather traditional? Will the board and senior management stand behind Ms. or Mr. Risk-taker?

As I reflected a bit more on that position posting, it occurred to me that that final quality listed is one that should be in every Christian's "mission description": risk-taking. Being a Christian is risky business! Jesus took a lot of risks. He risked offending family, friends, the religious establishment, and political authorities. And offend he did—to the point of ending up on a common criminal's cross as punishment. He was constantly calling his followers into the risky dangers of discipleship. All who would follow must likewise take up the cross; leave father and mother and family behind; go out on the road, two by two, to engage in the mission.

## RISK MANAGEMENT OR MISSION AVOIDANCE?

We live in a time and society that seek to minimize risks and maximize safety—at least for those who can afford the costs of security. "Risk management" is a large and growing field in the marketplace. Individuals and organizations seek to reduce risks. Many people take self-defense and personal-safety courses; install alarm systems or live in gated, walled communities.

***Being a  
Christian  
is risky  
business!***

***Jesus  
took a lot  
of risks.***

We purchase insurance of all sorts to reduce our liability for damages.

The church prudently seeks to be a good steward of resources entrusted to us. Synods and the churchwide organization, as well as a variety of entrepreneurs, provide information and resources to congregations on risk management. In these last few months prior to the calendar turning to 2000, there's a whole new market for those who seek to guarantee "Y2K compliance," assuring that massive computer systems won't fail us as the new millennium arrives.

Excessive risk managing, however, easily becomes mission-inhibiting. Most of us have known overly self-protective individuals and congregations. The doormat on the stoop says, "WELCOME," but upon entering the home you instantly feel its owner's uptightness about your presence. Children are particularly adept at sniffing out those fakers who bear a warm smile but cautiously extend a cold hand.

Whether you call them "spiritual seekers" or "church shoppers," first-time visitors can gauge a congregation's willingness to risk. The church sign out front may say, "All Are Welcome!" More subtle signals can communicate the real message. "You're sitting in my pew!" "If you can't follow our liturgy, something's wrong with you."

It's risky to invite strangers into your home or your congregation. They may change things, upset the balance, displace long-standing leaders. But playing it too safe, over-managing the risks of an open-door policy, inhibits the mission. Risk-free homes and neighborhoods become insular and stifling. Congregations into total risk-avoidance manage themselves out of members and mission in a hurry!

### **REASONS TO RISK**

With all the ways to avoid risks at our disposal, why take any risks, at all? As I reflect on my own life and the lives of others, there are at least four reasons I see for risk-taking. ***First, we sometimes take small or large risks simply because we are bored, adventure-some, or yearn for excitement.*** Foolhardy risk-taking probably happens the most in our younger years. A certain amount of risking is unavoidable and necessary as we grow and mature.



It's only mildly comforting to me as a parent that most cars don't go as fast these days as the V-8 muscle cars we drove in the late 1960s. Those old steel-bodied, seatbelt-less gas guzzlers nearly flew when we would "open them up." Needlessly endangering ourselves and anyone else on the road, as teens we did not hesitate to risk our lives for a fast ride. Dumb!

***A second reason for risk-taking is that doing so is necessary to gain new skills and leads to personal fulfillment and achievement.*** A cost/benefit analysis weighs the risks against the benefits that may be gained.

Flying single-engine aircraft is an avocation and passion for me. It's far safer than most people think, but there are some inherent dangers that no amount of careful preparation and attention to safety can totally eliminate. The risk rises as I give flight instruction to newer would-be pilots. Those first landings are pretty risky—for the student, for me, for the airplane, and for everyone and everything in the vicinity! But there's simply no other way to learn. After a few demonstrations by the flight instructor, the student has to experiment with the controls and bounce the aircraft back to earth. The sense of accomplishment and sheer joy of flight bring most fledgling pilots back for another lesson. They decide it's worth the risk. So do I!

***Serving others, enhancing their growth, or offering them protection is a third reason for taking risks.*** Because we care, we take risks on behalf of others. Each of us is alive because our mothers assumed the risk of childbirth. My paternal grandmother did not survive my youngest uncle's birthing.

Only in my adult years have I recognized my mother's risk-taking at the old swimming spot near our farm. She would sit on the shore of that small lake for hours as an unpaid lifeguard. I knew it back then, but it's significance escaped me: Mom doesn't know how to swim! But I never doubted then and remain certain to this day that if I had been in trouble, she would have plunged into the water to save me.

***Playing it too safe inhibits the mission.***

## THE ULTIMATE RISK: FAITH

***The final, and for Christians the most important, reason to risk is that in so doing we encounter***

***We find  
God in  
that risky  
“other-  
ness.”***

***God and advance the church’s mission.*** Down through history, thousands of Christian missionaries have exposed themselves to disease, hostility, persecution, and even martyrdom for the sake of serving and proclaiming the gospel in distant lands. While too many Christians stood by silently during atrocities like slavery and the Holocaust, some courageous souls risked their lives to run the underground railroads and shelter Jews.

Over the years, I have been blessed by participation in a number of risk-taking congregations and communities. The inner-city parish where I pastored was willing to risk losing its Scandinavian heritage by supporting an aggressive outreach into a Hispanic immigrant community. A congregation I joined while serving as a coalition director and on synod staff put itself out to welcome gay and lesbian persons. A special joy has been serving in ministry alongside many of the first-generation female clergy whose risk-taking, pioneering courage both inspires and humbles this male colleague. Twice I have been privileged to accompany for a time the courageous Christians of El Salvador who day in and day out risked their very lives as witnesses in a civil-war-torn land.

During those times that I’ve been on the risk-taking cutting edge, I have found that God is seen more clearly, and Jesus’ mission is experienced more deeply. Whereas God is always with and among us, the Holy Spirit seems to reveal Christ’s presence most fully outside our normal comfort zones. After many years of pondering Karl Barth’s description of God as “wholly other,” I have come to believe that wisdom. It is as we risk, as we expose ourselves to other people and new situations very different from the familiar, that we find God in that risky “otherness.” It is in the moments when we let go of over-controlling risk management that God sweeps us along in the swirling, churning, risk-filled baptismal waters that promise our salvation! **AW**

*Michael Cooper-White is director of the ELCA’s Department for Synodical Relations and is executive assistant to the presiding bishop of the ELCA. He and his wife, Pamela Cooper-White, and daughter, Macrina, live in Park Ridge, Ill.*



# When is it safe to risk?

*Laurel Hensel*

Several years ago I chaired the Social Ministry Committee meeting at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Chicago. We were a small group: Betsy, Mark, Betty, Julie, and me. At one meeting, when we were discussing our relationship with our sister congregation in El Salvador, Mark was unusually quiet. Finally he spoke.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I can't think about El Salvador right now because I just found out that Hiram has AIDS."

Mark and Hiram were long-time partners. Mark, a public-school teacher who worked with children with learning disabilities, was a private person who didn't talk much about his personal life. Yet he blurted out for all of us to hear that his world had been turned upside down.

We threw out the agenda for the rest of the meeting and rallied around Mark and his needs. What could we as a faith community do?

As it turned out, Julie served as their lay chaplain, visiting them many times a week, keeping us informed of their needs, and scheduling our regular gifts of food and visits. She was present when Hiram died. She later told me it was the most meaningful thing she had ever done.

Why did Mark feel safe enough to share his news with the rest of us?

I believe that Mark could risk opening up to us because the pastor and lay leadership of that congregation had created a safe environment.



*Members of Resurrection Lutheran (Chicago) visit La Resurreccion in El Salvador.*

That environment was built on a long tradition of risk-taking by the congregation, including the following:

- ◆ Building relationships with our Lutheran sisters and brothers in El Salvador even when our federal government did not encourage such relationships.
- ◆ Setting up a network of foster parents to make a difference in the lives of teens at risk in our neighborhood.
- ◆ Welcoming gay, lesbian, and straight people as members and leaders of our congregation, and affirming their committed relationships.
- ◆ Writing letters to our representatives in Congress about a wide range of issues and inviting local political figures to speak during coffee hours.
- ◆ Inviting an archdiocesan gay/lesbian group to use our worship space after the cardinal refused to allow them to meet in Roman Catholic churches.
- ◆ Using inclusive language for God.
- ◆ Holding a “strike school” for children to attend each time Chicago public-school teachers went on strike.
- ◆ Starting a program for kids involved with neighborhood gangs.
- ◆ Working to improve the local public schools, complementing their efforts by starting our own before-school and after-school programs.

Did all our members always agree with the actions we took? No. But we all knew it was safe to debate the issues, and we believed it was not OK to do nothing about them.

We all knew that being a member of this congregation meant seeing beyond our own walls, pushing beyond our own comfort levels, and reaching out to others when it wasn't popular. We were secure in the knowledge that as a people of God, we were called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). **LWT**

*Laurel Hensel was a member of Resurrection Lutheran Church, Chicago, from 1985 to 1992.*



IN THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

# Do advocacy

*Jan Erickson-Pearson*

"Listen to this, Mom!" Kaia paced the room with a magazine, "It says the factory workers are paid practically nothing and the conditions are terrible. Some of the workers are girls my age! Mom, we have to tell people about this! I'm going to write a letter, and I'm not going to buy their shoes ever again."

Welcome, dear child, to the complex world of advocacy.

I was inwardly thrilled by this unexpected outburst, and so deeply moved by my 10-year-old daughter's passion for justice that I hated to dampen the fires with discouraging news. But it was time to tell her that far too much of what we enjoy and rely on is produced under wretched work conditions by struggling people who receive minuscule amounts of money.

Today, athletic shoes; tomorrow, the whole store.

She started gearing up for a massive letter-writing campaign, gathering supplies and addresses. She called friends and her coach and urged them to join the boycott.

I asked if it bothered her that this was just the tip of the iceberg. "It's not only this one company," I explained. "There's more. Are you going to take them all on?"

"No, Mom," she said, using that patient tone one saves for the pathetically dimwitted. "I'm just doing what I can. This is something we can do."

As it turns out, however, Kaia had read a back issue of her favorite girl's magazine, and the current one carried



*Courtesy of  
LOGA*

good news: The company was changing. Consumer pressure worked.

Advocacy worked!

Yes, it can work. And it is something we can do.

Advocacy is the act of speaking on behalf of someone in need. It is the act of giving voice to the story of someone who can't find a listening ear or constructive response among the powers that be. We use our voice; we give witness to their experience. We use our power for someone else's benefit. And we have power, whether we recognize it or not. We can speak, we can write, we can tell about what we see and hear and feel and learn. That is advocacy.

### BEGIN BY LISTENING

"Listen, Mom!" It starts with listening. Whose voices do we hear? I give my daughter a lot of credit. She chose to listen to the stories of girls far from her home and experience. Do we listen to voices outside the mainstream? Are we hearing about the experiences different from our own?

### NO PROBLEM FINDING PROBLEMS

We learn about needs on the far side of the world from LWT and *The*

*Lutheran*; from other Christian magazines, such as *The Other Side* and *Sojourners*; and from newsletters from organizations, such as Bread for the World and Habitat for Humanity.

The American Association of University Women and the Southern Poverty Law Center are just two examples of groups that offer action alerts. We in the ELCA have the gift of the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) to help us keep up with congressional legislation and public policy.

All this information can be overwhelming! We could spend all day, every day, doing advocacy. Indeed, we know people who have made careers as advocates. And we know others for whom it's a volunteer vocation to spend time each week writing and calling on behalf of others.

It's easy to feel discouraged about everything one might do—and to be tempted to do nothing at all. We look at the myriad opportunities to give witness on behalf of others, and then we look away. We can't do it all. But we can do something. "This is something I can do," Kaia told me. And she's right.



We can do something.

It helps to make advocacy a part of the routine. Our former congregation had a table out one Sunday each month piled with information, sample letters, and stamped-and-addressed envelopes. We were invited to stop and be advocates for a wide variety of concerns. Those letters were part of our offering that Sunday, action on behalf of others who needed our voices.

## **ACTION AND ATTITUDE**

One of the greatest benefits and most poignant aspects of advocacy is that in the telling of another's story—in the act of asking on their behalf—their story becomes, in some important way, our own. We are linked. As we give voice to their experience, we are caught up with them in a way that makes us one. And that is truly as Jesus intended.

As Jesus prayed that we might all be one, he knew how vital it is for us to be aware of the fundamental inter-connectedness of creation. What we do on this side of the planet has great impact on our sisters and brothers and their children across oceans, deserts, rain forests, and seas. Telling their stories

in order to seek action that benefits them (and all people) brings us much closer together.

## **WORSHIP AND ADVOCACY**

Worship plays a key part in advocacy. We pray for others. We advocate in our prayers on behalf of those who are sick and grieving, those in our circles and communities and across the world who have special needs. Praying for others carries their concerns to God and it carries them closer to us. Also, as we worship we might choose to pray for courage to speak on behalf of those who need our voices.

## **GOD'S WILL BE DONE**

Hopelessness, in the face of so much to do, and often in light of little evidence that it matters, might lead us to give up. It helps to remember that we're not called to be successful; we are called to be faithful.

We also know that God desires health and healing, justice and redemption for all people, and that God's will cannot be forever thwarted. The early Christians found courage and energy to act, not on the basis of their optimism in the current

reality, but because of their ultimate hope in God's reign and the fulfillment of God's promises. So we, too, can act in confidence.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu responded to the question of how he kept the faith through the long years of apartheid in this way, "I knew I was on the prevailing side. It didn't look that way at the time, but I knew what God had promised and I believed. I told our oppressors, 'So come on over and join us; we're going to win in the end. Why not be on our side already?'"

We can't each do it all. But we do what we can and we do it in hope.

*Jan Erickson-Pearson is an ELCA pastor living in Naperville, Ill., with her two activist daughters and husband.*

## BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The ultimate advocate, of course, is the Holy Spirit. We learn most about advocacy from the Spirit, who gives voice to our fears and hopes—and who gives us power and urges us on. The comfort of the Holy Spirit is the comfort of confidence that we are not alone, and not on our own. We have One who intercedes for us.

And so we are called to intercede for each other—here, there, at home, across the continents. As Jesus sent the Spirit for us, so he sends us out, in the power of the resurrection, to intercede for others. That is advocacy. **LWT**

**For more information** and written material on **Corporate Social Responsibility**, contact: Trudy Brubaker  
c/o Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA  
9625 Perry Hwy.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15237  
412-367-8222

email: [Trudy.Brubaker@ecunet.org](mailto:Trudy.Brubaker@ecunet.org)  
Web site: [www.elca.org/dcs/advocacy/corpsoc.html](http://www.elca.org/dcs/advocacy/corpsoc.html)

**For information** on the **ministry of advocacy**, including a sample of materials, study packets on a variety of issues, and videos for forums, contact: The Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs  
122 C St. N.W., Suite 125  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
202-783-7507

email: [LOGA@ecunet.org](mailto:LOGA@ecunet.org)  
Web site: [www.loga.org](http://www.loga.org)



# God answers back

Nancy Donley



"God danced the day you were born—January 28, 1987." These joyful words, framed in a colorful print on my son's bedroom wall, mocked and tormented me. "What did you do, God, the day Alex died?" I screamed into the empty room. I sank to the floor, sobbing, and defied God to answer. God's answer was not immediately forthcoming.

I was truly blessed that cold day in 1987 when Alexander Thomas Donley entered into my world. He was born a perfect, healthy boy. With his vibrant red hair and ever-ready smile, he blossomed into a beautiful child in every sense of the word. But it was his inner beauty that really made him special. Alex's kindergarten teacher told me how he alone approached her when she returned to the classroom in tears after learning her aunt had died. He hugged her and said, "Don't worry, Miss Cody. She's with Jesus now."

Just one short month after graduating from Miss Cody's kindergarten class, my only child died. Alex died from eating hamburger contaminated with *E. coli* 0157:H7, a bacteria that lives harmlessly in the intestines of cattle but can kill a human being. *E. coli* 0157:H7 can contaminate meat during de-hiding of manure-covered cattle, or during evisceration if the intestine gets punctured. During the short course of his brutal illness, all of Alex's internal organs were destroyed and portions of his brain were liquefied. The toxins ravaged through his system. My husband, the doctors, and I watched helplessly as Alex suffered and finally died. I felt totally betrayed by the food industry, the USDA's seal of approval, and by my God.



*Alexander  
Donley*

Once I learned that Alex's hamburger had been contaminated with cattle feces, I was determined to learn where our country's food-safety system had failed. I learned that all the links along the food-safety chain, from farm to fork, were weak and needed strengthening. I joined and became actively involved in S.T.O.P.—Safe Tables Our Priority—a national grassroots organization representing foodborne-illness victims. Among other things, S.T.O.P. actively promotes policy changes to produce a safer food supply. S.T.O.P. was instrumental in getting new meat and poultry inspection reform, the first in more than 90 years.

Over the last four years I have attended countless policy meetings in Washington, D.C., with government officials and members of the meat and poultry industry. At times the reform process can be very discouraging. Economics and politics are involved. Every party wants to paint the other as the enemy and loses sight that the enemy is the bacteria.

It's been more than five years now since Alex died. Not a day goes by that I don't miss him and mourn.

So what did God do on July 18, 1993? Somewhere, somehow, during these past five years, God has answered my question. His answer didn't come to me in a dream or as a voice from a burning bush. Instead, I somehow realized that God wept the day that Alex died just as he did when his only son, Jesus, died. It was God's love for my son, and for all the sons and daughters of the world, that sent Jesus to be the sacrificial lamb.

I still grieve, and I know I will grieve for the rest of my life. But I don't grieve for Alex. I rejoice for his happiness. I am so grateful for Easter's empty tomb. The Good News of Easter reassures me that Alex has a place in heaven—along with God's son, Jesus, and Miss Cody's aunt. **LWT**



*Nancy  
Donley is*

*president of S.T.O.P. and a member of the National Advisory Committee for Meat and Poultry Inspection. She is also a real estate broker and a member of Edgebrook Lutheran in Chicago.*

For more information, contact S.T.O.P. (Safe Tables Our Priority) at 335 Court St., #100, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11231. 800-350-STOP; Web site: [www.stop-usa.org](http://www.stop-usa.org)

# Coming up in Lutheran Woman Today



This is it! We're coming to the end of "transition" and coming to the beginning of the new Bible study calendar for Lutheran Woman Today. Here's the pattern you can expect from now on: A nine-session Bible study will be carried in LWT, beginning in the September issue and ending in the May issue. (The January/February issue carries two Bible study sessions: sessions 5 and 6.) The September 1999 issue will offer the first session of *In God's Image: A Study of Genesis*.

You will find a full complement of companion resources available to enhance the nine-session Bible studies. See page 26 to learn more about the Resource Book, Leader Guide, and Companion Bible.

A three-session Bible study will follow each nine-session study, appearing in the June and July/August issues. Free leader resources will be available for the summer studies.

The pattern of a nine-session Bible study beginning in the September LWT followed by a three-session study beginning in the June LWT responds to reader requests for an academic-year Bible study schedule (September through May), and it also provides 12 Bible-study sessions for those groups that meet throughout the year. This will help new groups (such as groups of college students) to come together to participate in the three-session summer studies.

## COMING UP IN LWT 1999-2000

Here are the themes and article ideas planned for the LWT issues carrying the Genesis Bible study sessions. Sessions for *In God's Image: A Study of Genesis* will appear in the September 1999 through May 2000 issues of LWT.

Please note the **Reader call** opportunities for these issues. For more information about submitting a reader-call essay, see the box on page 25.



# COMING UP IN LWT 1999-2000

## September 1999 IN GOD'S IMAGE

Introducing the 1999-2000 Bible study in LWT; Care of creation; God and science; Created as God's own.

*Bible study session 1* ***The morning of the world*** (Genesis 1-2).

**Reader call** "God's creation, God's creatures" (due April 15, 1999). Share your experience of God revealed in nature or God revealed through pets and other animals.

## October 1999 FALLING APART

How original is sin? Shame; Women of the ELCA scholarships and grants; 86 days before a meaningful Christmas.

*Bible study session 2* ***Fall up, fall down, or fall apart?*** (Genesis 3: 1-24; 4:7; 6:5).

**Reader call** "A meaningful Christmas" (due May 15, 1999). What activity, event, or tradition gives special meaning to your Christmas celebration?

## November 1999 I WILL REMEMBER

Fidelity; Acts of God, acts of nature; Remembering the saints; Birthdays and anniversaries; Women of the ELCA Thankoffering devotion.

*Bible study session 3* ***God will never do that again!*** (Genesis 8:22).

**Reader call** "Faithful friends" (due June 15, 1999). Tell LWT about a friend who made a difference in your life and your faith.

## December 1999 FEAR NOT!

Fear and anxiety; God's promises; Naming; Vocation.

*Bible study session 4* ***Unconditional Promises*** (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:15-16).

**Reader call** "What am I afraid of?" (due July 15, 1999). Reflect on faith and fear in your life.

## January/February 2000 THE STARS OF HEAVEN

Epiphany journey; Kindness to strangers; Bringing the outside in; Intercession.

# IdeaNet

April 1999 • Vol. 2, Number 7

For Mission Together

## Leading Devotions

I had been asked to give the devotion for the annual mother and daughter banquet. What could I do that would involve the participation of some of the mothers and daughters?

"Lord, I need your input," I prayed. "You are the creativity within me. I depend on you to outline a plan that will bring a memorable message to the mothers and daughters."

I began by picturing the mothers and daughters arriving at the banquet, smiling with joy. I could imagine their happiness, their gracious conversation, their clothing a rainbow of colors. Then I saw a vision of a beautiful bouquet—more gorgeous than any I had ever seen. The bouquet captured the essence of every mother and daughter gathered at the banquet.

"They are indeed a reflection of your image, O God. But how do I turn this vision into a devotion?"

Then the idea came. At the local department store I found a jigsaw puzzle displaying a bouquet. After I put the puzzle together, I carefully removed the pieces that made up the individual flowers, making sure that each flower was framed by some of the background of the bouquet. I placed the pieces of each flower

on the adhesive side of contact paper and trimmed the edges. Then I glued the rest of the puzzle onto a poster board. Of course, the puzzle looked incomplete with the white spaces showing where the beautiful flowers had been.

I gave each flower the name of one of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I gave each attribute a number and wrote that number both on the back of the flower and in the matching space on the poster board.

In my devotion I explained that each mother and each daughter is a fragrant flower blooming where she is planted. Each is unique, but collectively all take their places in the body of Christ, bringing beauty and fragrance.

As I named the qualities, pairs of mothers and daughters came forward, placing the flowers back into the puzzle. The beauty of the bouquet came to life!

"Thank you, God, that we belong in your bouquet."

Marilyn Youngquist  
Mamrelund Lutheran  
Kent City, Mich.

# Postcard Ideas

## Hint for devotion leaders

My favorite Scripture texts for devotions are Romans 8:28, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Philipians 4:4, 8.

It is helpful for a novice to read a prayer written in advance rather than try to compose one on the spot. Also, a hymn verse may be used as a prayer.

*Darline Knutson  
Garfield, Minn.*

## Encouraging participation in Bible study

To help remove some of the burden of leading the Bible study each month, members of Martha Circle have used this way of preparing: One person calls ahead to several participants and assigns each the responsibility for one or two of the Bible study questions.

Using this plan increases the number of people who prepare ahead, and the responsibility of working on one or two questions isn't overwhelming.

If a person prefers not to take an assignment, her wishes are of course respected. A person who is less comfortable with leading discussion may be willing to contribute by making the phone calls.

*Ida Schmitt  
Good Shepherd Lutheran  
Bismarck, N.D.*

## Idea for opening a meeting

A leader once opened one of our meetings by passing around a box containing about 15 different items—things like a candle, a flashlight, a cross, a star. She asked each person to select an item and tell what memory had been brought to her mind by the item chosen. Everyone participated, and the memories shared set the stage for the whole meeting.

*Lillian Hart  
Little Norway Lutheran  
Black River Falls, Wis.*

## "Do Justice" with the LWR Coffee Project

Use "Do Justice," a collection of articles, prayers, Bible studies, and devotional materials, at your next meeting. Based on the biblical theme of doing justice, this ready-to-use packet provokes thought and complements the Lutheran World Relief Coffee Project. To order "Do Justice," call 1-800-LWR-LWR-2.

*Jennifer Uhler  
Lutheran World Relief*

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Send all  
**Postcard  
Ideas**  
to

**Women of the ELCA IdeaNet**  
8765 W. Higgins Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60631-4189  
Email: [IdeaNet@elca.org](mailto:IdeaNet@elca.org)



# Triennium Resources

Women of the ELCA welcomes you to spread the word of the Fourth Triennial Convention with specially created resources for the new triennium! These items will be available for sale after April 1, 1999. **Call Augsburg Fortress (800-328-4648) to order.**

## **"Live God's Justice"**

### **bookmark**

This brushed-gold memento makes a perfect keepsake or gift. Featuring the symbol for the 1999-2002 triennium, the bookmark is a great reminder to continue living God's justice.

Order code: 0-8066-3864-8

\$3.95

## **"Live God's Justice"**

### **program or bulletin cover**

Spread the word for the triennium in style by printing your meeting agendas or invitations to events on these three-color folders (8-1/2" x 11").

Order code: 0-8066-3865-6

\$4.95/pkg. of 50

## **About the Bible: Short Answers to Big Questions**

by Terence E. Fretheim

Have a child or grandchild being confirmed this year? Want to share your zeal for studying the Bible? Conversational in tone, these brief essays (a collection of the articles in the 1996-98 *About the Bible* series in *LWT*) make a great gift for skeptics and believers alike. They provide answers to some really

tough questions about the Bible in a respectful way that makes the reader say, "I want to learn more!"

80-page paperback

Order code: 0-8066-3867-2

\$8.99

## **Give Us This Day**

by Marj Leegard

A collection of Marj Leegard's thoughtful columns that have appeared in *Lutheran Woman Today*. You enjoy her in *LWT*, so why not buy a copy of *Give Us This Day* for a friend?

64-page paperback

Order code: 0-8066-3866-4

\$6.99

## **Genesis Bible study T-shirt**

Going to the 1999 Triennial Convention? Be sure to pick up your Genesis Bible study T-shirt. It's 100 percent cotton and comes only in size "comfortable" (L, XL, 1XL, 2XL). It's sure to be a hit at your Bible study meetings.

\$13.95 (available only at the convention)

## **IdeaNet**

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# Tips Tools for Leading Devotions

**Tip 1** **Immerse yourself** in Scripture and also in hymnals, prayer books, church magazines, and books of inspirational stories, devotions, or poems.

**Tip 2** **Be tuned in to God** during worship services and devotional times. Make note of anything from Scripture, sermons, prayers, anthems, hymns, or responses that really speaks to your heart.

**Tip 3** **Be attentive** to how God speaks to you and blesses you in your everyday circumstances, whether they are painful or joyful, difficult or mundane.

**Tip 4** **Reflect** on how these experiences and readings touch your life. Take time for meditation. You may want to try keeping a journal.

**Tip 5** **Pray for guidance** ahead of time. Your devotion should be appropriate for the occasion; consider the church season, time of year, or the special circumstances of your group. Do not be afraid to take an original or unconventional approach if you are led to do so.

**Tip 6** **Do not wait until the last minute** to prepare your devotion. Decide on your topic, gather your resources, write the devotion, and revise it as needed. Practice giving the devotion several times.

**Tip 7** **Consult several versions** of the Scripture passage you are using, and refer to Bible dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries to help clarify the meaning of your Scripture text or to give you further ideas and inspiration.

**Tip 8** **Tell stories or anecdotes** to help communicate your message. Give examples from your own life. Express your own needs and feelings.

**Tip 9** **Speak up, and speak slowly and clearly** when you present your devotion. Give your devotion with warmth and conviction.

**Tip 10** **Ask God** to make this an enjoyable growth experience for you and your entire group.

*Carol Graf  
Bethlehem Lutheran  
Aberdeen, S.D.*

*Bible study session 5*    ***Sodom and Gomorrah: Intercession and Judgment*** (Genesis 18:16—19:38).

*Bible study session 6*    ***Children of Abraham: Christians, Jews, Muslims*** (Genesis 16:1-16; 21:1-21).

**Reader call**    “The Journey” (due August 15, 1999). How has a trip changed your life?

**March 2000    WRESTLING IN FAITH**

Lenten devotions; Conscience; Dreams in the Bible; Rebecca.

*Bible study session 7*    ***Wrestling in faith*** (Genesis 25:19-28; 28:10-22; 29:31-30:24; 32:22-32).

**April 2000    EMPTYING THE TOMB**

Resurrection; The difficult stories; The last word; Spirituality.

*Bible study session 8*    ***Women with stories*** (Genesis 34:1—35:26; 38:1-30).

**Reader call**    “Beyond bunnies” (due November 15, 1999). What makes your Holy Week holy?

**May 2000    ALL MY CHILDREN**

Pentecost spirit; Families; Forgiveness and reconciliation; Planning for Acts.

*Bible study session 9*    ***A Family Reconciled*** (Genesis 37—50).

**Reader call**    “A child-like faith” (due December 15, 1999). What faith-lessons has a child taught you?

**ALL ABOUT READER CALLS ...**

LWT invites responses to reader calls. These are one-page essays on assigned topics. Find the topics and the due dates listed above.

Send the typed or printed (double-spaced) essays to LWT Reader Call, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189. At the top of your

piece, note the issue and topic, your name, address, and telephone number (with area code). LWT will return manuscripts that are not selected for publication if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is provided.

By submitting an essay to reader call, you give LWT permission to edit it and use all or part of your



essay in the magazine, and to allow others to reproduce the article in which your essay appears. All other rights to the essay remain yours. As our thank you, we will give each essayist published in LWT a one-year gift subscription to the magazine (to keep or give as a gift).

## ABOUT THE BIBLE STUDY IN LWT

*In God's Image: A Study of Genesis*, by Terence E. Fretheim, is the nine-session Bible study to appear in the September 1999 through May 2000 issues of LWT. Genesis is a book about a world, lovingly created by God. It's also a book about us, the people who inhabit that world, and about how God is at work and present among us.

One of the most intriguing things about the people in Genesis is that they are anything but perfect. God has fashioned them, like us, with the ability to make choices. And sometimes those choices are harmful to us, to other people, and to creation. Yet, the confession of faith in these stories is that God is at work in even our displeasing moments to bring life to the world.

## COMPANION RESOURCES

The only essential piece needed to do the Genesis Bible study is a subscription to LWT that includes the September 1999 through May 2000 issues. For those who wish to dig deeper, however, or who use the Bible study in groups, companion resources are available to enhance and enrich the study of *In God's Image*, including the following:

◆ **Resource Book:** A valuable learning tool, it contains


insights for a deeper exploration of Genesis and its meaning today. ISBN 0-8066-3859-1 (\$5.50).

◆ **Leader Guide** and audio-cassette: For leaders, it includes leader tips, background information, and answers to questions, everything a leader needs to help a group do the study. Also includes the entire Bible study resource book. The audiotope offers short devotions for each session. ISBN 0-8066-3859-1 (\$9.50).

◆ **Companion Bible:** This easy-to-use edition includes the complete text of Genesis and the biblical cross-references used in the Bible study. ISBN 0-8066-3861-3 (\$2.95).

To order these companion resources, and learn about others call Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648.

## SUBSCRIBING TO LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

LWT comes in three versions: a digest size, big-print format, and on audiotape (for the visually impaired). Subscribe through your congregation's LWT group coordinator for the first two formats and save—10 issues for just \$9.50. A group is five or more subscribers and a congregation may have more than one group. Or order an individual subscription for \$11.50. Call 800-426-0115, ext. 639, for information about subscribing to LWT, or to learn how to offer the group rate in your congregation. For LWT on audiotape, for the visually impaired, call the ELCA Braille and Tape Service at 800-426-0115, ext. 502. 

# They practice patient urgency

*Charles P. Lutz*

When U.S. Lutheran churches launched anti-hunger ministries in 1974, prompted by catastrophic famine in Africa's Sahel region, those efforts were seen as emergency responses. They were set up as educational and funding programs to last a few years, then be replaced by other needs.

Now, 25 years later, churchwide hunger programs are permanent fixtures in our Lutheran life. How have we been able to maintain hunger ministries for a quarter-century? What explains their staying power?

No doubt the chief factor is that concerned folks stay with hunger work year after year. Meet four women who are faithful, long-term ministers among hungry people.

## KATHRYN KOPF

"Parish mission festivals made a big mark on me when I was a child," Kopf recalls, "and my parents always gave to our congregation on a 50-50 basis: half for local budget, half for needs beyond our parish."

Now retired, Kathryn was a university teacher in Iowa and Ontario and a church executive in Pennsylvania. She credits her parents and her congregation in Ontario, Canada, with helping sensitize her to others' needs.

Kopf's personal hunger ministries have included financial and educational support of Lutheran Hunger Appeals, along with public-policy work. A long-time member of Bread for the World, the Christian citizens' anti-hunger movement, Kathryn regularly contacts elected officials from her Philadelphia home.

She believes "you can't be Lutheran without responding to those who are hungry—loving the hungry neighbor is simply a way of saying thanks to God for the gracious gift of salvation." The Letter of James has it right, Kathryn feels. "If your faith is real, it just has to show in deeds of neighbor-love."



*Kathryn Kopf*



*Dorothy Rossing*

## DOROTHY ROSSING

Professional and volunteer work have combined in Dorothy Rossing's commitment to hungry people. With academic degrees in food science and nutrition, Dorothy served as a food sanitarian, nutrition counselor to public-school teachers, and coordinator of the federal WIC (Women, Infants, Children) food program over more than 20 years in DeKalb County, Ill.

Rossing's volunteer activities include work with food pantries and homeless shelters, organizing CROP Hunger Walks, and helping refugees resettle. She has also supported the church's Hunger Appeal and Bread for the World.

Since retiring and moving from Illinois to Minnesota four years ago, Dorothy has become an anti-hunger leader in her congregation, Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer, Minneapolis.

"The community of God's faithful people always energizes me for this work," Rossing says. "So many church members long to get active in the hunger arena, and I'm happy to be the one who coordinates and prods."

Dorothy also credits her children. "I'm continually inspired by four activist daughters, who won't let me quit."

## GLORIA LUSTER

Gloria Luster's hunger ministry focuses on needs in her own community, Baltimore, Md. For 20 years she's been gardening on public city land. In 1996 Gloria added gleanings: collecting leftover fruits and vegetables from area farms.

The work is done chiefly by low-income people. The result is a large volume of fresh food flowing to inner-city residents via food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters. "We target the forgotten ones," Luster says.

She stresses the necessity of patience. "There's no such thing as instant gratification in this work," she says. "You need to commit for the long haul."

Gloria was a minority-business coordinator for Baltimore prior to her recent retirement. Now known as Baltimore's "garden angel," she acts under a clear sense of call from God.

"What got me into this was my faith, and it still gets fed through my



*Gloria Luster*



*Dorothy Borge*



congregation, St. John's Lutheran," she says. "But not only there—somehow, nurturing food also helps nurture my faith."

## DOROTHY BORGE

In 1998, Dorothy Borge received the ELCA Hunger Program's Extra-Step Award, recognizing her efforts in hunger ministries. Dorothy Borge offers leadership as Montana Synod hunger coordinator.

"When I was a small child in Wisconsin, my church was already giving an 'out-there' flavor to my world," she recalls. Since moving 20 years ago to Conrad in northern Montana, her commitment to hunger work has deepened. "This farming community has blessed me with faithful mentors."

Borge notes especially the women working on Lutheran World Relief parish projects. "Quilts, layettes, school kits, now the coffee project—some women have been at it 50 years! I'm awe-struck by their faithfulness."

With Conrad neighbors, Dorothy has helped organize collection of garden produce for a food pantry and annual CROP Hunger Walks.

To Borge, hunger work is inseparable from one's faith: "God expects us to stand with poor and hungry people."

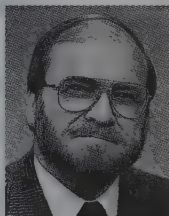
## URGENT WORK

Hunger alleviation, as these stories suggest, is urgent work. It's obscene for well-fed people to say, "Be patient—God will someday give you a better deal, a regular meal." God identifies with poor people urgently, unceasingly, and we're called to join God in that endeavor.

These stories also proclaim that hunger ministry means signing on for the rest of our lifetimes, nibbling away at hunger's causes day by day, year after year. Paraphrasing Jesus: "For you always have the poor with you" (Mark 14:7).

The Bible sees fighting hunger as lifelong mercy-and-justice work. Scripture thus also counsels us, along with the Thessalonian Christians, to guard against growing "weary in doing what is right" (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

These four women underscore that we're to be simultaneously urgent and patient. For a quarter of a century. For a lifetime. **LWT**

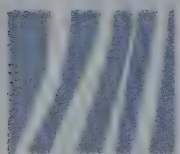


*Director of the former American Lutheran Church's Hunger Program from 1974 to 1981, Charles P. Lutz was also a Lutheran World Relief board member from 1986 to 1998. He is the author of Loving Neighbors Far and Near: U.S. Lutherans Respond to a Hungry World (Augsburg, 1994).*

# Secure in the Promise

A Study of Revelation

*Gwen Saylor*



## SESSION 4

### Persecuted for the promise

#### STUDY TEXT

Revelation 12:18–15:4

#### PROMISE VERSE

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” (Revelation 7:12)

#### OVERVIEW

The visions in Revelation 12:18—15:4 reveal the demonic forces behind Rome’s rule and reiterate God’s promise to defeat those forces. Christians today can expect to be persecuted for that promise.

#### OPENING

We praise you, loving God, for the death and resurrection of the Lamb. As we celebrate again the glorious day of resurrection, fill us with renewed commitment to your work on earth. Give us grace to stand firmly in the day when we are persecuted for our allegiance to you. Amen.

#### WAKE-UP CALL

Rome demanded allegiance to its religion and customs in all areas of daily life. This demand resulted in great economic hardships for the Christian communities of Asia Minor. In order to sell or buy products, Christians had to use coins stamped with the picture of the emperor or the goddess Roma. Touching a marked coin was considered a declaration of allegiance to the figure on it. Christians were caught between a rock and a hard place. What were they to do?

1. Imagine that you are an early Christian in Asia Minor. Your children are hungry. You want to buy your family bread but don't want to use Roman coins. What will you do? Why?

It is difficult for most of us to imagine what it must have been like to experience this kind of economic oppression. By virtue of citizenship and social class, most of us living in the United States are among the privileged of the earth. No matter how poor we may be, we are wealthy compared to our sisters and brothers on other parts of the globe who labor in brutal working conditions to earn less in a year than what many of us make in a week. In fact, because we demand so many consumer goods and consume so many of the world's resources, some people around the world see us as oppressors. To them, we may seem more like members of the Roman Empire than like the early Christians resisting its power.

2. Imagine that you are taking a child who is special to you to a mall to buy sneakers. When you arrive at the mall, you encounter a protest in front of the shoe store. The protesters urge you not to buy the sneakers, claiming they were made by children laboring under terrible conditions in sweatshops in Asia. What thoughts go through your mind? What decision will you make about the shoes?

Making sense of the economic realities with which we live and responding appropriately to them is difficult. As we work through the visions of Revelation 12:18—15:4, we will focus on the economic persecution experienced by early Christians because of their faith. In the process, we will keep before us this question: "How does the message of these visions, powerful to those suffering economic oppression, apply to us whose citizenship and social class mark us as among the privileged of the world?"

We will view the visions of Revelation as acts and scenes in a play. Imagine that you are seated in a theater. The intermission following the previous act is almost over. The stage curtain is ready to rise.



**ACT I DEMONIC FORCES BEHIND ROME (12:18—13:18)**

**Scene 1 The beast from the sea (12:18—13:10)**

As the curtain rises, a strange scene unfolds. While a dragon stands on a seashore, an incredibly ugly and fierce-looking beast rises from the sea (13:1-3). In amazement, the whole earth worships the beast and the dragon (13:4-6).

The description of the beast probably is modeled after the four beasts of Daniel 7:1-8. In Daniel, the beasts represent political powers oppressing the Jewish community by demanding allegiance to their gods and way of life. For the Christians of Revelation, Rome was a beast similar to those pictured centuries earlier in Daniel.

**3. Read Daniel 7:1-8 and Revelation 13:1-8.** To see how Revelation uses parts of Daniel's vision and adds other features to it, complete the following chart.

Information text	Revelation text	Daniel text
where beasts come from	Revelation 13:1	Daniel 7:3
how many beasts	Revelation 13:1	Daniel 7:3
animal images used	Revelation 13:2	Daniel 7:4-6
number of horns	Revelation 13:1	Daniel 7:7
description of mouth	Revelation 13:5-6	Daniel 7:7
source of authority	Revelation 13:2	
wounds healed	Revelation 13:3	
number of worshipers	Revelation 13:8	

*Note the features that appear in Revelation but not in Daniel. These features were added for a reason. Not only does the beast (Rome) reflect the beasts of Daniel, it is also pictured as the opposite of the Lamb.*

**4.** To see how this happens, match the features of the beast (Revelation 13:1-8) with those already ascribed to the Lamb (Revelation 3:21; 5:1-10; 7:9-10). As you complete the chart on page 33, note that the English translation of Revelation 13:3

“One of its heads seemed to have received a death blow”) is a smoothed out rendering of the Greek phrase “and one of his heads was slaughtered, as in death.”

What happened to the beast	What happened to the Lamb
Revelation 13:2	Revelation 3:21
Revelation 13:3	Revelation 5:6
Revelation 13:4	Revelation 5:1-10
Revelation 13:7-8	Revelation 7:9-10

From the perspective of Revelation, demonic forces underlie Roman religion and customs. These forces must be defeated if justice is to be done and salvation to become a reality on earth. The battle shaping up between God and the dragon, or Satan (12:1-17), also is a battle between the demonic forces powering the beast and the life-giving force powering the Lamb.

The beast has declared war on all who follow God and the Lamb (13:5-8). Resisting its claims may lead to persecution and even death at its hands. Yet this is precisely what Christians are called to do (13:9-10).

How the beast’s war is fought in the marketplace will become clear in the next vision. As the peoples of earth bow before the beast, the curtain falls.

**Scene 2 The beast from the earth (13:11-18)**

When the curtain rises, a second beast promenades across the stage. This beast, rising out of the earth, does great wonders and compels the earth’s inhabitants to make an image of the first beast and worship it. All who refuse to do so are killed (13:11-15).

This beast is the one responsible for the economic policies that cause so much hardship for Christians. The mark required by the beast (13:16-17) excludes from the marketplace all Christians who refuse to gain that mark by touching coins stamped with the image of the emperor or the goddess Roma. Economic oppression is central to the persecution endured by Christians clinging tightly to the promise that soon God will defeat the demonic powers of evil.

Just who is the second beast? Later he will be described as the false prophet (19:20; 20:10). He may represent the wealthy families that administered Rome's oppressive economic policies in the provinces. These families were willing to buy into the Roman system because it enabled them to maintain the lifestyle they valued. As administrators of the system, they probably were oblivious to the incredible suffering their policies imposed on other people.

After a voice identifies its number as the mysterious 666 (13:18), the beast waltzes off the stage. Once again, the curtain falls.

**5.** The number 666 has mystified Christians throughout the ages. Have you heard it identified in any way? How? What do you think it means?

## **ACT 2 MOVING TOWARD JUDGMENT (14:1—15:4)**

### **Scene 1 The Lamb's community (14:1-4)**

After a brief intermission, the curtain rises on a completely different scene. The beasts are gone. In their place stands the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 persons marked with his and the Father's seal (14:1). This group, previously identified as Christians still alive in the final times of the beast's rule (7:1-8), sings the new song that only they know (14:2-3).

The group is described as those who "have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins" (14:4). Does this mean that all 144,000 of them are celibate men? No. Revelation sometimes uses sexual imagery to talk about issues unrelated to actual sexual relationships. Some of this imagery may be offensive to us, but Revelation uses it repeatedly. For example, the reference to "virgins" in Revelation 14:4 is explained by the description of Rome as a "whore" in Revelation 17:1-18. The 144,000 have not defiled themselves with the "whore" (Rome)—with Roman religion and practices. In this sense, they are "virgins."

Over and against the beast and his army, stand the Lamb and his community. The new song celebrates the victory yet to come against the beast. As its melody echoes through the theater, lifting the spirits of the audience, the curtain falls.



## **Scene 2 Messages in the air (14:6-13)**

When the curtain rises, the stage is empty. One by one, three angels fly through the air, each proclaiming a message of salvation (14:7) or judgment (14:8-11). After yet another call to Christians to endure for the promise (14:12-13) despite persecution, the curtain falls.

**6. Read Revelation 14:1-11.** Think about the practice of using sexual images of women to promote or degrade a particular way of looking at something. Have you noticed how many advertisements for perfume feature beautiful, scantily clothed women? Can you remember grade-school taunts aimed at boys, such as, "You throw like a girl"? Can you think of other examples of this practice?

## **Scene 3 Bringing in the sheaves (14:14-20)**

When the curtain rises, the stage is filled with golden grain and ripe vineyards, all ready for harvest. From his perch on a cloud in the sky above, the risen Christ (pictured as the Son of Man) sweeps his sickle across the grain and gathers in the harvest (14:14-16). Then an angel swings his sickle to harvest the grapes of the earth (14:17-20). This harvest, identified as that of God's wrath, leads to an incredible bloodbath.

Early Christians would see in this vision a promise and a warning. At the final judgment, those persecuted for the promise now would be gathered by the Lamb. Those who complied with Roman demands in the present would share Rome's fate. This would have been a clear incentive to keep resisting Roman religion and beliefs!

The sight on the stage is terrible. While the blood of the grape harvest continues to flow, the curtain falls.

## **Scene 4 Song of God's justice (15:1-4)**

As the audience sits horrified in silence, the curtain rises to reveal seven angels standing in the background with seven plagues (15:1).

In the foreground, bright lights highlight the divine throne and martyred Christians around it singing a song of God's justice in judgment (15:2-4).

As their song of Moses and the Lamb fills the theater, the refrain of an earlier song of Moses dances through the air. That song, sung after the great deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus 15), celebrated God's victory over the oppressor Egypt. It is a model for the heavenly hymn anticipating God's victory over the oppressor (Rome).

As the hopeful refrains of both songs waft through the theater a final time, the curtain falls.

## WALK THE WALK

The visions of the beast and of God's promise to defeat it can give hope to victims of economic, political, and religious injustice in our world. Those visions name oppression in all its many forms as the demonic beast it is. They also proclaim loud and clear that God stands with the oppressed and will act against the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed.

The visions of the beast offer hope to the oppressed but are jarring to the privileged of the world—that is, to us. They remind us how easy it is for the privileged to slip into the role of oppressors. In order to maintain our lifestyle, we run the risk of supporting economic policies that harm others. In our drive to obtain the things we desire, we risk being oblivious to the incredible suffering endured by those who make the things we enjoy, or those whose natural resources are polluted or drained to meet our wants.

Revelation says that God takes the side of the oppressed. We who through Christ are called to be priests of God's kingdom (1:6) are called to do likewise. We may feel powerless, but we are not. We can use the power our privilege gives us to make a difference.

What can we do? Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Listen to what those harmed by our economic policies are trying to tell us.
- ◆ Learn to have a broader perspective, to understand ourselves as part of a greater whole.
- ◆ Work through our political processes to change policies that harm others, even if they benefit us.

Listening, learning, and working are time-consuming and often discouraging tasks. We may be criticized, mocked, or trivialized when we act in accordance with beliefs. Yet we can cling to our identity as God's baptized and beloved ones.

We can set our sights on a greater justice. As we do this, we may experience persecution for the promise. "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (14:12a).

7. One night your television screen is filled with pictures of Mexican parents mourning children who died from mysterious forms of cancer. The parents blame a U.S. company for the children's deaths. It seems this company has been storing its toxic waste in garbage dumps near the children's homes. You buy many products from this company and have always been very satisfied with their service. Remembering the visions of Revelation 12:18—15:4, how can you "walk the walk" faithfully in this situation? What can you do?

## WAIT AND WATCH IN HOPE

Our call to "walk the walk" is grounded in and sustained by the good news of Easter. God promises to continue guiding us toward a life that honors all. Because Jesus has risen, we can sing the heavenly victory song. God loves us, failings and all. Because Jesus has risen, we can work to make that song a reality in our world.

8. Take time to relax and enjoy the good news of Easter. Listen carefully for passages from Revelation in Easter hymns, liturgies, and special music. (See page 30 of the Bible Study Leader Guide for more information on these hymns.)

## LOOKING AHEAD

In the next session, colorful visions will show us how the oppressor (Rome) will be prosecuted by God's promise to work justice on earth. Study texts are Revelation 16:2-16; 17:1-6; 18:9-19. **LWW**

*Gwen Sayler is associate professor of Hebrew Bible at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.*

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*Secure in the Promise: A Study of Revelation* is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and edited by Catherine Malotky. Questions or comments about the Bible study should be sent to Barbara Hofmaier, director for educational resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.





# Tell of the saving power

Marj Leegard

Is growing old new to you? You might smile at the description of the not-so-young in Ecclesiastes 12:2-5a:

"Someday the light of the sun and the moon and the stars will all seem dim to you. Rain clouds will remain over your head. Your body will grow feeble, your teeth will decay, and your eyesight fail. The noisy grinding of grain will be shut out by your deaf ears, but even the song of a bird will keep you awake. You will be afraid to climb up a hill or walk down a road. Your hair will turn as white as almond blossoms. You will feel lifeless and drag along like an old grasshopper" (Contemporary English Version).

I have visited most of those places and, indeed, dwell in some of them. If these woes of ear, eye, memory, and knee were all we had, or all our future held, however, we should be more miserable than an old, crackly, brown grasshopper. Fortunately, we have some added information!

"Our God has shown his saving power, and his kingdom has come!" (Revelation 12:10b, CEV). Put aside the almond-blossom hair and the ears that cannot hear what they should yet are irritated by barely audible noise. Put aside the fear of walking up the hills. Instead, run with the women who are given the Easter message to carry. The tomb is empty. Jesus lives! Sing it out. Tell it with the loving tasks your hands are doing. Tell it with your smiles and your generous nature. Tell it with your love for those around you.

Age is not a burden but a mantle given to those who have lived a little longer. We have lived long. We have seen Easters come many times. The wonder is always new. Our ability to tell what we have seen is always renewed. We come from the empty tomb to find the waiting ones who need to hear.

All around me I see women whose lives tell me that they have seen the rolled-away stone, the discarded grave clothes, the angels. I want my life to say to others that I, too, have seen and heard, and am on my way to tell. **LWT**

*LWT columnist Marj Leegard is a member of Bakke-Lund-Richwood parish in Detroit Lakes, Minn.*

# Meet "Creative Reading"

*Linda Post Bushkofsky*



From the letters and email messages I receive, I know that many of our readers regularly meet and discuss books. But for those who haven't had the opportunity to be part of a book group, let me tell you about a Women of the ELCA book group at my church.

This group, Creative Reading, is made up of members of St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minn. They let me sit in on a recent discussion of Jan Karon's *At Home in Mitford*, the first in her widely read series of books about a small town in North Carolina and the intermingled lives of the characters who live in that town.

About 10 women gathered for this discussion, although the group numbers nearly three times that. After the group caught up on recent personal happenings, the discussion started. On this particular night the leader began with some snippets from an article Jan Karon had written in a popular women's magazine. This helped to get to know the author a bit more and helped set the stage to visit the fictional town of Mitford.

As the discussion unfolded, the leader referred to notes she had taken when she reread the book for the evening's discussion. Some of the other readers referred to their own notes as well.

Many of the discussion questions came from a study guide printed along with *Out of Canaan*, the fourth book in the Mitford series. These questions were just the beginning, for the discussion went down many paths as the evening went on.

The discussion came to an end all too soon. The evening was not yet over, however. As the group lingered over dessert, I asked some questions about Creative Reading and found in it what I've heard said about many other book groups.

While membership has changed somewhat over the years, a core group has been meeting for more than 30 years! Members stick with the discussions—even when they don't like a particular book—for the community that the group offers and nurtures. Over the years there have been some group members who were not members of the congregation, although most are.

So, I asked, was there anything about this particular book group that distinguished it from a book group sponsored by a secular organization or independent group? The members thought for a minute and several came to the same conclusion: No matter what the topic, the group always manages to find spiritual issues in the books and spends significant time discussing those spiritual issues.

"We come and laugh and actually learn something," said one member. "I read stuff that I wouldn't otherwise touch," another member noted. Someone else remarked that the discussions create an incentive to

read. In order to broaden their experiences, the group will sometimes watch a movie based on a book they've read.

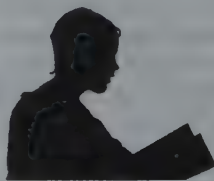
There is no set pattern for selecting books. Sometimes a member will suggest a book she has read. Other times the members will look at reading lists from other book groups. For a couple of years the books had been rather serious and heavy, so the next year the group went for lighter, happier reading.

You might find it interesting to know what Creative Reading has on its 1998-1999 reading list. In addition to *At Home in Mitford*, the list includes *Walk Two Moons*, by Sharon Creech; *The Color of Water*, by James McBride (reviewed in the June 1998 LWT); *Your Oasis on Flame Lake*, by Lorna Landvik; *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, by Rebecca Wells; and *The Heart of a Woman*, by Maya Angelou.

Read on, now, for a review of *At Home in Mitford*. Although I've written the review, it's based on the spirited discussion of this book by the women of Creative Reading.

***At Home in Mitford*, by Jan Karon. Penguin Books, 1994.**

*Reviewed by  
Linda Post  
Bushkofsky*



Mitford is that imaginary small town where some part of us wishes we lived. In a day when so many of



us crave community and work so hard to achieve it, community simply is in Mitford. The mayor's motto says it all: "Mitford takes care of its own."

Father Tim, a 50-ish bachelor, serves as rector of the local Episcopal parish. He leads a fairly quiet, predictable life but finds himself brought down by exhaustion and fatigue. Enter Barnabas, Dooley, and Cynthia—and suddenly Father Tim experiences renewal. Barnabas is a grace-filled mutt who shows up one day. Dooley, an untamed boy from the neighboring hills, ultimately comes to live with the rector. Cynthia, the rector's new neighbor, writes children's book featuring her cat, Violet.

The lives of these characters become intertwined with the other residents of Mitford. Nothing extraordinary happens, yet you come to love and care for them. Or at least most of them. You might even come to crave the grace and community that exist in Mitford. That's probably what makes *At Home in Mitford* such a popular novel.

Once you've come to know all the Mitford characters you'll probably do what I did—run right out and buy the other three books in the series: *A Light in the Window*; *These High, Green Hills*; and *Out to Canaan*. Karon is currently working on a fifth Mitford novel (due out later this year). Two more novels,

a novella, and a Mitford cookbook are expected to follow.

#### FOR REFLECTION

1. Describe the community that Mitford's residents experience. Where do you find community? Have you found it in your book group?
2. Describe the theology that is lived out in the lives of Mitford's residents.
3. How do Father Tim and Cynthia experience God's grace through their respective pets, Barnabas and Violet? How have animals been present with you on your spiritual journey? **LWT**

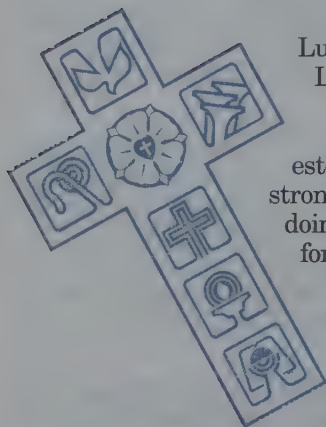
*"Bookmarks" columnist Linda Post Bushkofsky and her husband, Dennis, are members of St. Stephen Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn.*

If you'd like to introduce a new generation to Karon's writing, pick up *Miss Fannie's Hat* (Augsburg, 1998), a lovely children's story about Miss Fannie (a character based on Karon's grandmother) and the difficult decisions she faces as she's asked to donate a hat for the church fund-raiser.—**LPB**

To submit your own book review contact Linda by email at [linda.post.bushkofsky@ecunet.org](mailto:linda.post.bushkofsky@ecunet.org) or write her c/o LWT, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

# Assembled around the Gospel

*Paul R. Nelson*



Lutherans are interested in worship. Many Lutherans—from pastors to altar-guild members, from instrumentalists to those who worship regularly week to week—are very interested in worship. Because we care, we often have strong personal commitments to certain ways of doing things when the congregation is assembled for worship.

Another way in which Lutherans show their interest in worship is by the curiosity that often bubbles up within us about the ways we worship and the things we use in worship. The churchwide offices of the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America receive hundreds of telephone calls each year about worship. People call to ask, "Who chooses the Bible readings that we use each week?" "Why do the colors we use for our altar and pulpit hangings (paraments) change so often?" "Should we have flags by the altar?" "What kind of robes are best for the choir?" "When can children come to Holy Communion for the first time?" "Is it all right for Christians to be cremated when they die?" "Are plastic flowers acceptable in church?" "Why are sick people marked (anointed) with oil in church?" "Why is there no benediction on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday?" The list goes on and on. Lutherans are curious about what happens in worship and why it happens.

People who are not baptized Christians are often interested in our worship as well. Today people are often invited to share in one another's worship. Christians may be invited to a Jewish Seder. Christians may invite Jewish friends or relatives to the celebration of a baptism in the family. Marriage may be celebrated with a couple who do

not share the same religious tradition or worship practices. In these situations, the questions that usually come first have to do with what will actually happen and what the visitor will be expected to do. Questions about meaning follow later.

This interest in worship, whether it shows up as deep commitment or curiosity, is a very good thing. Worship is at the very center of what it means to be the church for Lutherans. Our Confessions teach the following: "It is taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, article VII).

It is when we are "assembled" together around the Gospel preached and the sacraments administered that we are most truly church. This happens most clearly when we gather for the worship.

If you have visited Lutheran congregations other than your own, you may have noticed differences. Lutherans have

traditionally believed that worship is not a matter of making every congregation worship in exactly the same way. Room for variation to meet local needs is important. This is especially noticeable when it comes to the music that congregations sing together in worship.

Luther's *Small Catechism* reminds us that being gathered for worship is not our own doing. It is the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth." Worship is first, last, and always about God. For Christians this means the God who is described in the Bible as the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In the church of Luther's time in the late Middle Ages, this was made clear in the form and structure of the prayers used in public worship. These prayers were addressed to God the Father. They were offered "through Jesus Christ our Lord." They were prayed in the power of the Spirit. This form of prayer honors the God whom we confess in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. Many of these ancient prayers can be found as prayers of the day in *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Archbishop




Thomas Cranmer in the Anglican Church originally translated many of these prayers from their original Latin into English. One wonderful example is:

*"Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen"* (p. 56).

Everything we do in worship ought to focus our attention on God and the gift of Jesus Christ to us for our salvation. On the other hand, anything that turns our attention away from God in worship needs to be rejected. This sounds like a simple principle, but it is often difficult to apply to real situations. It requires patience and goodwill.

In some of the next few issues, Lutheran Woman Today will explore some important questions about worship and the vision that lies behind them. The whole of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed by its *Initiatives for a New Century* to "deepen our worship life." Women of the ELCA's Executive Board

names worship as a priority for the triennium.

Some of the columns coming up will be based on the new statement on sacramental practices approved by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Philadelphia in 1997. That statement is called *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on Sacramental Practices*. This statement is available from Augsburg Fortress (call 800-328-4648; \$4.95, ISBN 0-8066-36483). It is also available on the ELCA home page at [www.ELCA.org/dcm/worship/sacpracst.html](http://www.ELCA.org/dcm/worship/sacpracst.html). This statement is this church's basic document on worship, after the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. To quote from the preface in the sacramental-practices statement: "In a world of yearning, brokenness, and sin, the Church's clarity about the Gospel of Jesus Christ is vital. God has promised to come to all through the means of grace: The Word and the sacraments of Christ's institution." Join us as we learn about the practice of Word and Sacrament. 

*Paul R. Nelson is director for worship in the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries.*

# Women and Children Living in Poverty: A faith-based response



Because poverty remains at crisis proportions in the United States, Women and Children Living in Poverty continues to be a major programmatic focus of both the ELCA and Women of the ELCA. Here's a brief look at the journey we have taken since our beginnings in 1988 and a glimpse of where the future may lead us.

## A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- 1988** The ELCA Division for Outreach and Women of the ELCA commission a study of poverty among women and children in the United States. The resulting report with recommendations for action is distributed among the church leadership.
- 1990** Women and Children Living in Poverty is designated as the Women of the ELCA triennial emphasis.
- 1991** The ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopts a "Call to Action," asking the church to intensify its ministries with women and children living in poverty and to develop a churchwide strategy.
- 1993** The Women of the ELCA emphasis on this issue is extended through 1999, and the Churchwide Assembly adopts a "Plan to Listen and to Act," which is intended as an action blueprint for the entire church.
- 1996** Women of the ELCA in its triennial convention expands the emphasis to incorporate all women in crisis "through programming and funding into the 21st century." In recognition of the ongoing devastating effects of poverty, women and children living in poverty continue to receive priority focus.

## THE "PLAN TO LISTEN AND TO ACT"

Our faith-based work against poverty continues to be guided by this plan, which emphasizes sensitizing, evangelical outreach, service in partnership with persons in poverty, advocacy, and leadership development. Listening to and receiving guidance from women who live in poverty is central to the plan, which encourages people of faith to promote actions that would do the following:

1. build contacts among people of different economic groups;

## Women of the ELCA



We're all in this together  
Women and Children  
Living in Poverty

2. commit resources toward the elimination of poverty;
3. encourage organizing and networking among women in poverty;
4. expose the connections between racism and poverty; and
5. foster networks of women, congregations, and social ministry organizations for collective action against poverty.

## WOMEN OF THE ELCA: A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE

Since 1988, Women of the ELCA has been in the forefront of the church's actions against poverty. Women of the ELCA sponsored 20 training events between 1988 and 1992. These training events examined such issues as welfare, homelessness, illiteracy, and prison ministry. They incorporated site visits, skill training, and opportunities to listen to low-income women.

Resources have been developed to help individual and group efforts that assist and advocate for women and children in poverty, including videos, a manual for planning local events, Building Blocks of Hope resource packets, and the Thirty Days/Thirty Ways Calendar of Caring. Contact Women of the ELCA at 800-638-3522, ext. 2747 for more information.

### Did you know that ...

Since 1988,  
Women of the  
ELCA has  
awarded more  
than  
**\$1,825,000 in  
grants  
and loans to  
programs  
supporting  
women and  
children in  
crisis.**

Women of the ELCA cooperates with many other areas of the church in efforts of service, advocacy, and empowerment. A conference at Trinity Seminary, co-planned with Women of the ELCA, targeted church and social-service-agency leaders. Churchwide training brought three people from every synod to strategize for action regarding rural, urban, and suburban poverty issues. "Families in Poverty" seminars were co-planned with Lutheran Men in Mission, and modeled how communities can work together to address poverty.

Working together we do make a difference. Working together we can answer God's call to make a difference in the lives of those who are poor. **LWW**

*Doris Strieter, program director  
Women of the ELCA*



## LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Women of the ELCA is committed for the long haul to working with women and children living in poverty. Plans for 1999 and beyond include:

- ◆ **Synod pilot programs** in which four synods will model how Women of the ELCA and the ELCA can work together to respond to poverty.
- ◆ **"Journey to Wholeness" video** and discussion guide, featuring programs supported by Women of the ELCA grants.
- ◆ **"Journey to Justice"** resource-packet additions on community and hospitality, faith stories of women in poverty, and a workshop module.
- ◆ **A resource on advocacy for children**, developed in collaboration with the ELCA initiative on "Help the Children."
- ◆ **A resource on prison ministry** incorporating biblical reflection and ideas for action.

*For information on these and other resource materials relating to Women and Children in Crisis, call Women of the ELCA at 800-638-3522, ext. 2747.*

## UPDATE: KATIE'S FUND IS ON A ROLL

The response to Katie's Fund (formally known as the Katherine von Bora Luther Endowment Fund) has exceeded expectations! Thank you! As of December 31, 1998, Katie's Fund stands at \$161,961.

Katie's Fund is an endowment, which means that its principal is preserved in perpetuity. Only the interest income will be used to support:

- ◆ **global sharing** to enhance global partnerships, increase multicultural awareness, and promote service;
- ◆ **leadership development** to encourage participation in the women's organization and provide for personal growth and enrichment;
- ◆ **living theology** to focus on scriptural teachings and to nurture our walk with Christ.

Katie's Fund was named in memory of Katherine von Bora Luther, wife of Martin Luther. To request a short biography of Katie, a Katie's Fund brochure, or a skit about Katie's Fund, call Marlene Narbert at 800-638-3522, ext. 2726.

*For information on planned giving, contact Catherine Marquis, Women of the ELCA's director for planned giving, at 800-638-3522, ext. 2744.*

# Packing, with prayer

Has this ever happened to you? A big trip is coming but packing gets left to the last possible minute.

Well, sisters, that's usually me, but let me tell you why I've already started packing for Triennial Convention 1999—and I hope you will join me in doing the same.

This early version of my packing list does not detail clothes or shoes. Instead, in December I began my packing list with seven points of prayer, one for each day of the week.

## MONDAY

Prayer for the convention as a whole.

## TUESDAY

Prayer for all the faithful women who are planning the worship, speeches, events, business, and fun we'll enjoy in St. Louis.

## WEDNESDAY

Prayer for the 17 women and four new officers who will serve as our churchwide executive board in the coming triennium.

## THURSDAY

Prayer for the staff partners who are developing the programs and services that will be introduced at the convention.

## FRIDAY

Prayer for the convention delegates who will set direction for Women of the ELCA into the 21st century.

## SATURDAY

Prayer for the participants who will come to be inspired and equipped for vibrant ministry back home.

## SUNDAY

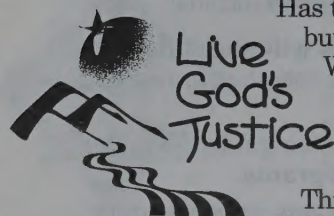
Prayer for the presence and guidance of God's Holy Spirit through and in all we do.

My dream for Triennial Convention 1999 is that it will be a prayer-packed convention for each of the 5000 or more women who will attend. When I prayerfully imagine my way around St. Louis, I trust God to show me how I need to prepare my life and pack my bags for the trip.

As you plan for triennial convention, I hope you'll join me in this daily prayer for a prayer-packed convention. If you won't be able to attend, please join us in prayer, too. We're packing for more than a convention. We're all packing for a journey into the 21st century, and nothing will replace prayer in making us strong and ready. **LWT**

See you in St. Louis!

*Catherine I. H. Braasch, Executive Director  
Women of the ELCA*







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